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ABSTRACT

The evaluation of 45 recent bachelor's degree graduates of non special education teacher preparation programs employed questionnaire and interview measures of both teachers and their respective building principals. Teachers were asked to evaluate their pre-service training program in preparing them to teach in mainstreamed classrooms, their own competence in teaching handicapped pupils and their current role in the special education process. Principals independently assessed their teacher's competence, described their view of the teacher's role in the education of the exceptional child and provided suggestions as to what pre-service training should include. Both teachers and principals agreed that there should be greater interaction between prospective teachers and exceptional children during training, particularly through participation in IEP (individualized education program) conferences. Self-ratings of teacher competence were positively correlated with amount of exposure to handicapped children during training. Principal ratings of their teacher's competence validated teacher self-ratings in all categories except that of contributing to IEP conferences. Description of current roles of teachers revealed that principals did not expect their teachers to take an active part in the instruction of exceptional children, relying instead on the special education teacher to administer the IEP. Teachers reported little involvement in the planning, conduct and administration of programs for handicapped learners, other than initial referral. This discrepancy between actual role and expectation of teacher training programs was greatest for secondary level teachers. (Author)

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Recent graduate's ratings of their training and current role in the education of mainstreamed children

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Abstract

This evaluation of 45 recent bachelor's degree graduates of non special education teacher preparation programs employed questionnaire and interview measures of both teachers and their respective building principals. Teachers were asked to evaluate their pre-service training program in preparing them to teach in mainstreamed classrooms, their own competence in teaching handicapped pupils and their current role in the special education process. Principals independently assessed their teacher's competence, described their view of the teacher's role in the education of the exceptional child and provided suggestions as to what pre-service training should include.

Both teachers and principals agreed that there should be greater interaction between prospective teachers and exceptional children during training, particularly through participation in IEP conferences. Self-ratings of teacher competence were positively correlated with amount of exposure to handicapped children during training. Principal ratings of their teacher's competence validated teacher self-ratings in all categories except that of contributing to IEP conferences.

Description of current roles of teachers revealed that principals did not expect their teachers to take an active part in the instruction of exceptional children, relying instead on the special education teacher to administer the IEP. Teachers reported little involvement in the planning, conduct and administration of programs for handicapped learners, other than initial referral. This discrepancy between actual role and expectation of teacher training programs was greatest for secondary level teachers.

The evaluation of teacher education programs has too often suffered from inadequate instrument selection, poor sampling procedures and lack of clarity as to exactly what was being evaluated. The deficiencies have been described most recently by Katz, Raths, Moberty, Kurachi, and Irving (1981) in a review of 28 follow-up studies of teacher education graduates. They note for example, that most follow-up studies include non-teaching graduates within their samples, and do not differentiate the attitudes and competencies of these respondents from those of employed teachers. Katz et. al. found an average return rate of 67 percent for the 28 follow-up surveys they reviewed, of which only 60 percent of respondents were teachers. Thus only 40 percent of all respondents were teachers. The attitudes and ratings of these Ss might be markedly different from those of non-teachers, and should be identified as such.

The Katz review also found that the survey questions employed were often vague, so that specific components of the training program could not be identified. They also noted that the "feed-forward" problem in teacher training causes (post hoc) opinions of program graduates to be relatively useless. "Feed-forward" is most familiar to us in the use of various media where for example, one inserts film in a movie projector at one place and it is moved through various mechanisms to eventually be projected on the screen. In teacher education much instruction involves the insertion of information early in the training process with the hope that the student will learn and retain it, to eventually be used later in practice. Unfortunately, without any basis in experience to attach to the new information, many students forget not only the information, but the accompanying learning activities which

accompanied it. At the time of evaluation of past training, graduates may recommend activities which had actually been provided, but were resisted, not attended to or forgotten at the time. Thus the evaluation responses of recent graduates are affected not only by the usual failures of memory, but by additional factors during training.

The evaluation described in this study tries to attend to the observations of the above researchers. We have attempted to employ a modified multitrait-multimethod approach to evaluation as first recommended by Campbell and Fiske (1959). They believe that more than one trait (factor) and more than one method of data collection should be employed in conducting reliable and valid evaluations. Of particular interest to us was convergent validation of the methods employed. If two measurement procedures conducted independently produce the same result then convergent validation can be established (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). In an evaluation of a teacher education program, Middleton and Cohen (1979) attempted to employ a multimethod strategy. They combined paper and pencil surveys and interviews of both past graduates and faculty to determine program weaknesses. Both groups agreed that six competencies involving the instruction of exceptional children were perceived to be inadequately included in the training program, thus providing convergent validity.

The attitudes of recent graduates toward training components related to instruction of exceptional children were of primary concern in this evaluation. The teacher preparation curriculum of the University of Kansas had been revised in earlier years so that contacted graduates were among the first trainees to have received the modified program. Specifically, we were interested in the following:

a) ratings of specific dimensions of the training program

b) suggestions for improvement of future training programs

c) self-ratings of graduate's perceived competence in selected teaching skills relevant to the education of exceptional children

d) verification of these self-ratings by principals

e) identification of attitudes toward different categories of exceptionality

f) identification of attitudes toward basic concepts of instruction of exceptional children

g) differences between the above attitudes and self-ratings between elementary and secondary teachers

h) ratings of graduate's current roles as teachers in mainstreamed classrooms.

This report will describe only those findings which relate to preparation of teachers of exceptional children and their attitudes toward their role, and not to specifics of the training program.

METHOD

Subjects

The original pool of Ss consisted of 80 bachelor's degree graduates of the teacher education program at the University of Kansas who had not majored in Special Education and who were now employed in regular classroom positions. These individuals had completed the course work and field experiences which composed the education of exceptional children component required of all undergraduates preparing to teach. All Ss had graduated within the last two years and currently held teaching positions within a 50 mile radius of Lawrence, Kansas. This group was not randomly selected; but included all those employed teachers who could be located through University and school district records.

The 80 teachers were contacted by letter and follow-up phone calls. Of the group of 80, 45 agreed to participate in the study, by returning the questionnaire, a 56.25 return rate. Thirty of these teachers taught at the elementary school level, while 15 were secondary school teachers. Respondents did not differ from non-respondents in terms of the proportion teaching at different grade levels, or by school district.

For the teacher interviews, 18 Ss were chosen from the 45 Ss who participated in the questionnaire phase of the study. The criterion for inclusion in the interview was exposure to exceptional children during their current teaching assignment. In addition, Ss were chosen who represented both rural and urban areas and secondary and elementary teaching fields in a similar proportion to the questionnaire sample.

In addition, 17 principals were included in the study. These principals were chosen if they supervised one of the 18 Ss in the teacher interviews. One principal supervised two teachers in our sample.

Materials

Questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed in several sections. Section One requested information about the Ss and their current teaching assignment. Section Two was designed to assess Ss' attitudes (on a 5-point Likert scale) about the value of their academic training and the value and extent of their placement. Also, open-ended questions were asked to determine the Ss positive and negative attitudes about their undergraduate training.

Section Three was designed to measure the self-ratings of Ss' technical teaching skills. These technical teaching skills were taken directly from the list of competencies required in the teacher training program at the University of Kansas. There were three separate categories. The first, "Instructional planning and assessment," contained nine items. The second category, "Instructional management," was based on four items. The third category, "Professional communication," was based on five items. The intercorrelations of these three sets of items indicated that each set made up a well-defined category.

Interview Formats

The teacher interview was designed to obtain more detailed information about the Ss' involvement with exceptional children. The first interview question explored additional questions the Ss had concerning the answers of their questionnaire. Question two investigated Ss' training and field experience. Ss were asked to rate their training and suggest revisions that were needed in the program. The Ss were also asked a series of questions about the experiences with exceptional children in their field work and in student teaching. Later questions examined Ss' current involvement with exceptional children. Ss were asked to describe their specific function in the referral process and also how they evaluate the progress of an exceptional child.

In the first section of the principal interview, principal's expectations of teachers in educating handicapped children were explored. The principal was asked to explain the teacher's role in the referral process in his/her building including interaction with special services personnel, interaction with parents, and the teacher's input in the placement of the child. Principals

were also asked to describe the teacher's role in instructing and managing the behavior of exceptional children. Section Two included a rating of the KU teacher under the employment of the principal in regards to educating handicapped students. Principals were asked to compare the KU teacher with another teacher on staff with a similar background. The purpose of this section was to provide a validity check of teacher's self-ratings. Principals were asked to rate their teachers on the teaching skill dimensions of participation in the referral process, modification of curriculum for exceptional children, classrocm management, evaluation of progress and expression of positive attitudes toward exceptional children.

RESULTS

I. Questionnaire

Tables 1a, 1b, and 1c present pertinent demographic data about the 45 teachers who completed the questionnaire. Returns were found to be proportional to those initially sent, according to location of school district, and urban, suburban or rural classification of school district. The return sample can thus be considered representative of the original set of identified teachers.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Ratings of undergraduate training

Teachers were asked to rate their undergraduate training in preparing them to teach exceptional childrne. A number of categories--such as

course materials, instructor's skill, field experiences, and opportunity to observe exceptional children were rated. As a group, the graduates rated both their on-campus activities and their student teaching assignments as being in the average range. The only significantly low score (1.79 on a 1 to 5 scale) was the extent of their involvement in IEP conferences. Apparently student teachers had few opportunities to be involved in IEP meetings during student teaching. There were no differences between elementary and secondary school teachers in ratings of their undergraduate participation.

Ratings of training and self-ratings of teaching skills

Significant positive correlations were obtained between high ratings of the effectiveness of the training and (1) self-ratings of instructional planning, (2) self-ratings of instructional management, (3) level of comfort in using an IEP, (4) value placed on individualized instruction, and (5) level of effectiveness in meeting the needs of exceptional students. Involvement with exceptional children during student teaching was significantly correlated only with high levels of comfort in having exceptional students in regular classroom settings. Interestingly, respondents who placed a high value on their student teaching placement for preparing them for their current teaching assignment also rated themselves higher in (1) instructional management skills, (2) professional communication skills, (3) effectiveness in meeting needs of exceptional learners, and (4) overall teaching skills.

Current role of recent graduates

Current involvement in Individual Educational Plan (IEP) development was found to be linked to higher ratings of teaching skills. Elementary

teachers rated their teaching skills at higher levels than did secondary teachers. Elementary teachers who are involved in the development of IEPs for exceptional students rated themselves higher in teaching skills than did either elementary teachers who are not exposed to IEP development or secondary teachers in general. Secondary teachers who are involved in IEP development rated themselves at the same level as did the lowest elementary teachers not currently involved in IEP development. Secondary teachers who are not involved in IEP development had the lowest self-ratings in teaching skills.

The individual interviews also addressed the current involvement of teachers with exceptional students in mainstreamed situations. All of the 18 respondents reported some instructional responsibility for exceptional learners, although only five worked with them on a regular basis. Of the 18 reporting some responsibility, only four had identified or knew of different instructional objectives for exceptional learners and only three had copies of the IEP for each student. IEPs were typically in the possession of the special education teacher.

Thirteen of the respondents reported having to adapt their instructional techniques or materials for exceptional students, with "slowing down the pace" or "using a one-to-one format" the most frequently mentioned adaptation. In the area of referrals, eight of the 18 had initiated referrals on their own, which seven individuals could describe the procedure to be followed. Three respondents "weren't sure" of the procedures involved. The eight, who had already made referrals, reported continuing contact with resource personnel after placement.

The most common referral procedure was for teachers to bring a learning problem to the attention of the school principal or department chairperson, at which point a decision to seek diagnostic help was made. At that point

most teachers filled out referral forms and provided work samples and anecdotes as part of the initial request. After diagnostic testing, if that was in order, teachers might provide additional information. They were often in attendance at IEP conferences, although this did not occur in all cases. After placement, the most frequent contact with resource personnel was on an informal basis, -- over lunch, in the hall, etc. Only one of the eighteen respondents reported formal contacts on a regular basis with special educational personnel in reference to a mainstreamed child.

Interviews of Principals

Principals were first asked to describe their expectations of their teachers' role in educating exceptional children. The general finding was that teachers were expected to work as part of the resource team, but major responsibility was expected of the special education or resource leader. Providing documentation, helping in writing the IEP, providing input into level or placement decisions, and identifying instructional strategies were all areas that teachers were expected to be involved in by more than half of the interviewees. The majority of principals felt that special education teachers should have major responsibility for evaluating pupil progress, writing the IEP, directing the IEP conference and deciding specific instructional strategies. Both regular classroom teachers and special teachers were expected to stay in contact with parents, informally and in formal conferences (usually twice a year). Principals expected teachers to initiate the process of referring students with learning problems but as a rule, further steps were initiated by special service personnel.

Principal's Ratings of Teacher Competence

Principals rated their teachers on six teaching skills: participation

in the referral process, contribution to IEP conferences, modification of curriculum for exceptional children, classroom management, evaluation of progress, and expression of positive attitudes toward exceptional children. These ratings were correlated with teacher's self-ratings on similar dimensions. Correlations are presented in Table 2.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Examination of these correlations reveals significant agreement between principals' ratings and teacher's self-ratings for five of the six competencies. These results provide convincing evidence of convergent validation of the interview and questionnaire methods employed in the study. Teacher's judgments in assessing their own skills generally seem to be supported by principal's independent judgments. The only non-significant relationship was that of teacher's contribution to the IEP conference. This can readily be explained by the fact that most principals do not expect or require their regular classroom teachers to participate in IEP conferences, so they would have little evidence on which to base such a judgment.

Discussions and Implications

Both teachers and principals agreed that there is a need for greater amounts of field experience during teacher training, particularly experiences that cause prospective teachers to interact with exceptional children and their parents. Participation in IEP conferences, working individually with

exceptional children and sitting on instructional planning sessions were all recommended. Exposure to exceptional students was found to increase teachers' perceived comfort level in working with special education students. It is reasonable to assume that for prospective students to grasp concepts related to U.S. Public Law 94-142 they need to be comfortable with the notion of having these students in their classrooms.

Ratings of training were found to be positively correlated with self-ratings of teaching skills. Self-ratings of skill in instructional planning, skill in instructional management, level of comfort in using an IEP, and perceived level of effectiveness in meeting needs of exceptional children related to positive ratings of training. However, another question on the survey asked teachers to rate the extent they were exposed to exceptional children during student teaching. Responses to this question correlated only with teacher's comfort level in having exceptional students in regular classrooms. Apparently, mere exposure to exceptional students does not enhance teacher's perceptions of their ability to teach them. When teachers feel their student teaching experience is valuable in preparing them, their perceptions of their teaching improve. "Valuable" may be defined as having received guidance from cooperating or supervising teachers and having had success in teaching exceptional students. The suggestion arises that careful selection and supervision during student teaching is necessary for improving teacher's perceptions of their skills to meet the needs of exceptional learners.

Another finding of interest is the discrepancy in perceptions of teaching skills between secondary and elementary teachers. Secondary teachers consistently rated themselves lower than elementary teachers in their perceptions of their skills in teaching exceptional children -- particularly in areas of instructional management and professional

communication. The discrepancy may be due to the fact that elementary teachers have more field experiences during training. Increased field experiences for secondary teachers may alleviate the discrepancy. Another explanation may be that the survey questions (and competencies from which the questions were drawn) do not reflect issues important to secondary education as perceived by teachers and principals.

The results suggest that current involvement of teachers with exceptional children is not necessarily as assumed in current training programs. Teachers reported they did have instructional responsibility for exceptional learners, but few knew of specific objectives or the IEP. Little formal contact with special education teachers was noted after initial placement. The model of instruction of exceptional learners pursued by most training programs is that classroom teachers play an integral part in their instruction, with important roles in conducting learning activities, evaluating progress, communicating their observations to special services personnel and parents and participating in necessary program planning. Apparently this view is discrepant from current practice.

The discrepancy may be partially explained by the complexity of the teacher's current role and its time constraints, so that behaviors deemed desirable (and which were rated as important by the survey sample) may not always be implemented. Certainly, further research and analysis is needed to determine how the goals of mainstreaming can be incorporated effectively into the reality of present day education.

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Table 1a. Characteristics of 45 teacher respondents.

Grade Level	Elementary	32
	Secondary	13
Graduate Work Related to Exceptional Children	Yes	9
	No	36
In-service Education Related to Exceptional Children	Yes	10
	No	30
	Not sure	5

Table 1b. Frequency of Referrals or of Using Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs).

		Yes	No
Frequency of Referrals	Elementary	20	12
	Secondary	6	7
	Total	26	19
		Yes	No
Frequency of Using IEP	Elementary	18	19
	Secondary	2	11
	Total	20	25

Table 1c. Type of Exceptional Children in Teacher's Classroom

	LD*	EMR	ED/LD	EMR/LD	LD/ED
Elementary	16	1	3	2	3
Secondary	6	0	4	0	1
Total	22	1	7	2	4

* LD = Learning Disabled; EMR = Educable Mentally Retarded; ED/LD = dual classification Emotionally Disturbed/Learning Disabled; EMR/LD = dual classification EMR and LD; LD/ED = dual classification LD and ED.

Table 2. Correlations between principal's ratings and teacher self-ratings on six teaching competencies (N = 18)

Competency	r
Participation in referral procedure	.53 *
Contribution to IEP conferences	.16
Modification of Curriculum	.49 *
Classroom Management	.47 *
Evaluation of Progress	.67 **
Positive Attitudes	.46 *

* Indicates significance at 0.05 level
** Indicates significance at 0.01 level